Forum Cultural Mundial 2004

Culture and Social Development: Dividing Responsibilities

Sao Paolo, Brazil (30-06 to 02-07-2004)

Culture as a key survival factor for humankind

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"In the great hall of the mighty space,
Where sun looks like a speck,
If anyone calls himself great,
He is impolite - uncultured, that is,
He still has not discovered
His relations with the Universe."

Hafiz, Iranian poet (14^{th} Century)

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The linkage between culture and social development has not yet fully evolved in the concepts and the models of development nor in the mental structures. It represents a intersection of these two main determinants of the quality of life and of the search for effective solutions of humanity's ills. This approach calls for:

** The existence of a vision resulting out of a societal consensus; an endogenous model of development in harmony with socio-cultural values capable of ensuring social justice, freedom and dignity;*

** A strategy for the elimination of poverty, ignorance, humiliation and cultural alienation;*

** Policies and educational systems which emphasize participation, anticipation and self-reliance for the promotion of creativity, innovation and cultural diversity the absence of which hinders peace and endangers the survival of mankind.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me, first all. thank most sincerely the Forum Cultural Mundial 2004 which is hosting this gathering as well as the World Cultural Forum Alliance for their invitation. The subject of today sums up, in a nutshell, a personal lifetime battle of almost half a century.

As far back as 1958, I struggled within the Third Commission of the UN General Assembly to pass a resolution, in the name of the Moroccan delegation and nine other countries, emphasizing the "close interdependence of the economic and social dimensions of development". After a lengthy discussion, Resolution 1258 (XIII) was approved by the General Assembly on 14 November 1958 in the Plenary Session. In the Commission debate only two countries had voted against it – The United States and Brazil. I am happy today to see another Brazil, quite different from the one of 46 years ago, taking the lead on such a vital issue.

That same year, as one of the drafters of the Mandate of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), I managed to introduce "social development" as one of its objectives - an aim which was not to be found in the Statutes of other regional economic commissions. It is easy to relate such events but it is much more difficult to describe the reluctance which people had with respect to the use of the term "social". It was automatically given an ideological tinge and implicitly seen as an assault against capitalism and liberalism. People were conditioned by economic theories which sharply distinguished between "productive" and "non-productive" investments – the latter category applied to the social sector. The linear thinking accompanying the Rostow "stages of growth" dogma relegated the human dimension of development to a marginal role. Third world countries are now paying heavily for this huge blunder the main cause of which is their blind acceptance of the diktat of the external expertise and sources of financing.

My concern for the linkage between cultural development and social development can be summed up in one word: ***values***.[1] As a

[1] If you search through www.google.com for " elmandjra values" and "elmandjra valeurs" (French) you obtain a total of over 1100 references.

Professor of economics I learned very soon how disastrous were the policies of economic "development" which were pushed down the throats of third world countries and which overlooked the strategic role of cultural values. These imported models ignored not only the cultural and social dimensions of development but equally the basic principle of participation of the populations concerned in the determination of economic policies. Mimicry has never been a healthy approach to self-fulfillment. Fernand Braudel has written, "*On reconnaît une civilisation à ce qu'elle refuse d'emprunter*" (one recognizes a civilization through what it refuses to borrow).

Twenty years in the international civil service, including the responsibility of Assistant Director general in charge of the UNESCO Sector of Social Sciences and Human Sciences and Culture (1966-1968), have enabled me to observe, in theory and in practice, the extent to which the importance of culture as an essential factor of socio-economic development was underestimated. When I launched, in 1966, a UNESCO program concerning the elaboration of "cultural policies", the juxtaposition of "culture" and "policy" was considered a sacrilege by some.

It was with great difficulties that UNESCO was finally able to organize an "Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Europe" in Helsinki in June 1972. That same year however, the Minister of the Economy and Finance of France, Giscard d'Estaing, asked UNESCO to assist him in the organization of an international debate on the relations between *"economy and human society".* This meeting represented a breakthrough for the linkage of economics and socio-cultural development especially in view of the fact that it was sponsored by a Ministry of Finance of a major economic power and

also due to the level of the participants and the diversity of their specialties and their responsibilities.[2]

The concept of “cultural policy” was slowly admitted in the developed countries but in most third world countries it has remained, up to this day, a shell without content. The economic and financial policies being considered as the key pillars of development, the social dimension finds itself relegated to the welfare sector and culture frequently reduced to an exhibitionist mock folklore destined to the tourists. The idea of integrating culture as a component of developmental policies has yet to see the day in the third world. I very much hope to be told in this conference that I am wrong and that Brazil has already embarked on such an approach.

It is difficult to speak of UNESCO and culture in this country without paying respect to a great scientist and scholar from Brazil – that is to Professor Paulo E. de Berredo Carneiro who was the Permanent delegate of Brazil and member of the Executive Committee for many years. He was multi-disciplinary in his thoughts and actions. I observed him as he coordinated the work of about 500 researchers, from all over the world, which led to the publication by UNESCO of the *Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind* (12.000 pages in seven volumes) in the seventies. Later on, as Chairman of the International Campaign for the Safeguard of the Monuments of Nubia which he animated with great success, he demonstrated remarkably his commitment to universality through his compassion for the heritage of

[2] The proceedings were published in 1972. See Economie et Societe Humaine. Editions Denoel, Paris .
The participants were : Raymond Aron, Raymond Barre, Francois Regis-Bastide, Jacques Delors, Paul Delouvrier, John Diebold, Mahdi Elmandjra, Edgar Faure, John-Kenneth Galbraith, Roger Garaudy, Valerie Giscard D’Estaing, Peter Harper, Andre Jeanson, Aubrey Jones, Bertrand de Jouvenel,, Robert Jungk, Herman Kahn, Peter Mansholt, Olof Palme, Aurelio Peccei, Guiseppe Petrilli Jean Saint-Geours, ,Leopold Sedar-Senghor, Lionel Stoleru and Shigeto Tsuru.

mankind, It has been a great honor to collaborate with a person of this caliber whose culture was as vast as the land he came from.

As we see, the connection between culture and social development has not yet fully evolved in the concepts and models of development not to speak of the mental structures. It is at the intersection of the cultural and social dimensions of the developmental process that effective solutions for the improvement of the quality of life ought to be sought. Such an approach necessitates first of all a “vision” resulting out of a societal consensus and not one imposed by autocrats and bureaucrats.[3] It has to be a vision, in harmony with socio-cultural values, capable of ensuring social justice, freedom and dignity through the elimination of poverty, ignorance and cultural alienation[4].

To this day, my favorite definition of development is the one given by Rene Maheu, Director General of UNESCO, in his speech at the UN Conference on Science in 1965, when he said “le developpement est la science devenue culture” (development is when science becomes culture). For the science to become culture the input of values and learning processes are indispensable.

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[3] *“ … a new vision is needed based on the enforcement of international law, more effective regulation of world markets and more democratic, accountable and efficient global institutions to formulate and carry out policies on behalf of people everywhere..,”*- The Declaration of Sao Paolo of 29 October 2003.

[4] The harsh facts are well known – 3 billion people living with less than two dollars a day and over one billion illiterates in the world. The Declaration of Sao Paolo of 2003 says, “*The global divide between poverty and wealth has reached intolerable proportions and the mounting pressure on natural resources makes the current model of globalisation unsustainable. Social inequality is worsening and undermining the stability of societies in more and more countries. And while the percentage of the world’s population living in absolute poverty is declining, the number of people struggling to survive in such poverty has never been higher, as nearly three billion people now live on less than two dollars per day, most of them being wom*en.”

Values are a most precious source for political, economic as well as socio-cultural analyses. They help to systemically understand "purpose". Van Bartalanfy a biologist who wrote an important book "On Systems" (1942) in which he elucidated the phenomenon of "feedback", had a very concise and extremely deep formula in which he says, *"If there is a purpose, there is a system*". Values constitute the algorithm which leads to the deciphering of "*purpose*".

Back in 1978, as a member of the North-South Dialogue Roundtable of the Society of International Development (SID), I said that,

> *"The emphasis on value systems is needed to bring out the fact that the present North-South crisis is not merely one which will be overcome with partial adjustment s here and there. It is a crisis of the present system as a whole. Any solution must envisage a redefinition of objectives, functions and structures, and a redistribution of power and resources according to values other than those which are the cause of the crisis and . breakdown of the existing system. »* [5]

On 2 October 1986, in a televised debate on NHK, in Tokyo with Jean Jacques Servan Schreiber about international cooperation, I stated that *"the causes of future conflicts will be of a cultural nature »*.

Social development depends heavily on learning as a process. The more so as human resources have become the, in main ingredient a knowledge society, for economic and socio-cultural progress. The writing of the Club of Rome Report, "No Limits to Learning"[6] has reinforced my belief that socio-cultural values are as it is said in the study "the enzymes of development". They are the catalysts of social development and innovative learning - a by-product of participation

[5] Mahdi Elmandjra, "Political Facets of the North-South Dialogue", Working Paper 4, May 10, 1978, SID, Rome.

[6] James Botkin, Mahdi Elmandjra, Mircea Malitza, *No Limits to Learning, Report to the Club of Rome,* Pergamon Press, London (1979). This Report has been translated and published into 13 languages.

(solidarity in space), anticipation (solidarity in time) and self-reliance (solidarity with oneself).

I have never been a supporter of bilateral nor multilateral aid which I compare to the “law of the poor” in 19th Century England. On the eve of the famous 1981 Cancun Summit about the North-South Dialogue I wrote an article at the request of the French newspaper *Le Monde* in which I emphasized the shortcomings of the international system and indicated that development problems were essentially structural ones and could not be solved merely by foreign investment and charity. This approach simply maintains an,

> *" international system which generates and entertains inequalities at the socio-economic level, one-sided authoritarian measures in the monetary field, conserves archaic institutional practices, backs unilateral political and military initiatives and behaves ethnocentrically in the scientific and cultural realms."* [7]

I often compare “aid” to “aids”. They have many things in common. They both reduce the immunological capacity of the system to react to external aggressions; they increase dependency on outer remedies which are very expensive. Nothing is more costly and more damaging than aid because it imposes systems with exogenous values and very little relevance to the needs - particularly the social and cultural needs of the people to whom that aid is destined.

The underestimation of the importance of social development combined with the effect of internal mismanagement and corruption, on the one hand, and an external exploitation through post colonialist policies, on the other, are leading to an explosive situation. Yet everyone is searching for “stability”- for whom and at what price? The most fashionable development stunt is to use it as a means to

[7] *« La loi des pauvres a fait long feu »*, Le Monde, Paris, 21-10-1981.
Test of the interview, see **http://www.elmandjra.org/lienloidespauvres.htm**

export ready-made democracy as a quick food to nourish the hungry people of the third world !

In the earnest opinion of someone who has devoted a good part of his life to international cooperation with passion and compassion, the bilateral as well as the international “development” programs have been a short-lived illusion. When inequalities exceed a critical point it becomes difficult to envisage dignified forms of dialogue. "Development" which was the backbone of the «North-South Dialogue» and considered to be a crucial contribution to peace has slowly lost its aura, It has suffered from the unevenness of the forces at play in North-South relations and from the shortfalls of the spokesmen of the South who, in most of the cases, were not credible in the eyes of their populations. Maybe, the main lessons of the failure of the “development” myth is that its underestimation of the role of socio-cultural values in the process of development and of the democratic backing of the populations concerned. The experience of Japan shows us that,

> *“Although Westernization led to progress on a worldwide basis in terms of material civilization, Japan's modernization served as evidence that modernization is different from westernization”*[8]

The myth of “development” has been a short-lived illusion for the populations directly concerned even it continues to provide a number of jobs and contracts for studies and projects for an army of consultants, specialists, experts and technicians in

[8] NIRA (Japanese Institute for Research Advancement) : "Research Output - Agenda for Japan in the 1990's".

"*developmentology*"[9] and to justify the survival of archeological remains of institutions which were once meant to be useful.

This failure is an important lesson as to the gap which has developed between the "elites" and the "populations" of the third world countries. These internal disparities between the "haves" and the "have-nots" exceed today those between the North and the South. The expression "sustainable development" has enriched the jargon without bringing any substantial changes for the vast majority of the world population - it has sustained poverty, nurtured inequalities, condoned the violation of human rights and maintained in power unrepresentative governments. All of this with the blessing of the "aid givers" for whom the aid is like an insurance policy to maintain in power those with whom they deal. The most fashionable development stunt is to use it as a means to export ready-made democracy as a quick food to nourish the hungry people of the third world ! Who in the North is ready to accept really free democratic elections in Africa, the Middle East or South-East Asia ? Social development is unimaginable without democracy which can ensure dignity and the rejection of humiliation as a mode of governance.[10]

Cultural values are becoming, more and more, the main determinants of international relations as well as the generators of armed conflict. Georges Bush and his son Georges W. Bush have both invoked, on many occasions, the defense of "values" and "style of life" as a justification for attacking Iraq. This has led me to qualify the 1991 Gulf war as "*The First Civilizational War*" - I used that expression for the first time in an interview with the German magazine "Der Spiegel"

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[9] A term especially coined for the "Forum Cultural Mundial 2004", one could also use "developmentics" or "developmentonomy" to enrich the jargon of the "developmenters".

[10] ? See Mahdi Elmandjra, L'Humiliation a l'Ere du Mega-Imperialisme", Ed. Annajah, Casablanca (2003)

in the issue dated 15 February 1991 and chose it as the title of the book I published that same year.[11] Two years later Samuel Huntington wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* of April 1993 entitled “Clash of Civilizations”.

In view of the debates which have gone one about the two theses, I simply wish to stress that my approach was a *preventive* one which underlined the growing weight of socio-cultural values as a potential source of conflict and stressing the importance of cultural communication as an antidote. I was so much convinced of this reasoning that I decided in 1991 to dedicate the royalties of all my writings to an endowment from which is financed the "North-South Cultural Communication Prize" which is attributed every year, since 1992, to a laureate from the North and another from the South.[12]

Huntington’s approach is of a prescriptive nature. I have no difficulty in following him

when he writes what I said myself seventeen years earlier on NHK,[13]

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[11] *The First Civilizational War* was published in arabic in 1991 and in French **in** Casablanca in 1992 by the Editions Toubkal ; the Japanese edition came out in 2001 (Ochanomizou, Tokyo). The French and English translations are available on the internet **< http://www.elmandjra.org/livres.htm>**

[12] For details concerning this Prize including the names of the laureates during the last 13 years, see www.elmandjra.org/prix.htm

[?] See page 6 above and «Le Temps stratégique » No 82, Geneva, july-august 1998 which wrote, “Deux ans avant Samuel Huntington Mahdi Elmandjra annonçait la "Première guerre civilisationnelle" (two years before Samuel Huntington Mahdi Elmandjra announced the First Civilizational War. It is true that Huntington starts Chapter 13 of his book with the sentence, *“La Premiere Guerre Civilisationnelle”, the distinguished Moroccan scholar Mahdi Elmandjra called the Gulf War as it was being fought.*”

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> "*It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.*" [14]

Huntington goes much and further and identifies the non-Judeo-Christian world as the source of these potential conflicts and prescribes a set of initiatives to curb these dangers. I shall not dwell on this thesis which is very sectarian and culturally aggressive with very little room for mutual tolerance between cultures. It gives more justifications for the need of cultural communication to reduce violence, avoid armed conflicts and tone down the arrogance of the "*indispensable nation*". [15]

How can 5% (290 millions) of the world population impose its values on 6.4 billion people provoking local feuds and international armed conflicts? The war against Iraq was and still the First Civlizational War, Afghanistan was the second [16]. Who is next ?

Maybe the real purpose of both culture and social development is to build peace and prevent wars,

> "Since wars have become the expression of cultural arrogance, cultural arrogance, cultural humility is now the new name of peace. Cultural communication has thus become one of the major challenges of A Common Path for the Future"[17]

Let me conclude with two quotations, one from the South and one from North.

> *" I want the cultures of all lands*

[14] Foreign Affairs, p. 22 , Volume 72, No. 3, Washington DC (Summer 1993).

[15] Madeleine Albright described the United States as "*the indispensable nation*" and added " *we stand tall and hence see further than other nations.*" (In, S. Huntington,"The Lonely Power", Foreign Affairs, March-April '99, p 37)

[16] ? See, Mahdi Elmandjra, The Afghanistan War - The Second Civlizational War, the End of the Empire which started it, Ochanomizou Shobo, Tokhyo (2003).

[17]

to blow about my house, as freely as possible,
but I refuse to be blown
off my feet, by anyone of them"

Mahatma Ghandi

"Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world ... would do this, it would change the earth."

William Faulkner